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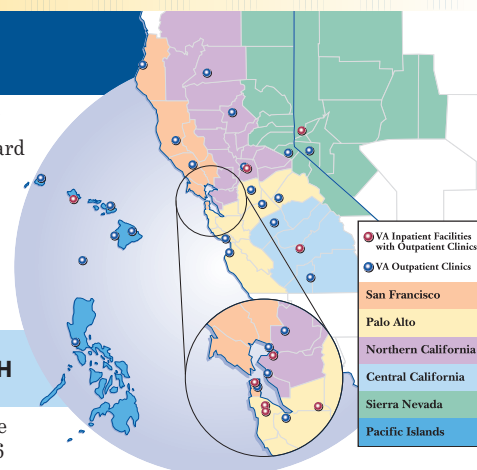
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VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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Honolulu, HI 96819
(808) 433-1000

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Veterans' health matters

Study Shows Veterans Outweigh General Population

It certainly is no news that the majority of Americans of all ages are overweight, but a recent study has shown that the situation is especially critical among military veterans. According to a report on the study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, two-thirds (67.2 percent) of American males in the general population are overweight, and 25.7 percent are obese. Among veterans, those figures increase to 73 percent and 32.9 percent, respectively.

Among women, those in the VA system also recorded higher results than their counterparts in the general population: 68.4 percent vs. 61.9 percent are overweight, and 37.4 percent vs. 33.4 percent are obese.

In at least one respect, the results surprised some researchers. According to Linda Kinsinger, M.D., M.P.H., of the VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, "Obesity in adolescence often leads to obesity in adulthood. However, these veterans were unlikely to be obese in early adulthood when they were required to meet military weight requirements."

Dr. Kinsinger, who co-authored the study, and her team examined the medical records of nearly two million veterans (mostly men) at 136 VA health centers nationwide.

Their goal was to calculate each patient's body mass index (BMI), which is the primary factor in measuring obesity. A BMI between 18 and 25 is considered healthy, with readings of 25 to 30 considered overweight, and 30 and above indicating obesity. Individuals with a BMI of 40 and above are classified as being severely or morbidly obese, with the greatest risk of developing serious health problems.

Proper diet and regular exercise have long been recognized as the ideal means of weight loss. To help veterans better manage their weight, the VA is developing a comprehensive weight management program that will provide, in Dr. Kinsinger's words, "an opportunity to test and implement systemic changes in medical care delivery to improve the health care of overweight and obese patients."

Another Option

For those veterans suffering from severe obesity, the mortality rate is significantly higher than for others, and, as a result, a moderate to long-range weight management program may not be the answer. One VA study of 200 morbidly obese men, ranging in age from 23 to 70, showed increases in mortality rates ranging from six- to 12-fold. Less than eight years after the study was completed, 25 percent of the men had died.

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Veterans' health matters

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a word from our director

Robert L. Wiebe, M.D., M.B.A.
Director, VA Sierra Pacific Network

Get a MOVE! on...

In the last several months, there's been a lot of discussion in the medical literature and general media about obesity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 65 percent of U.S. adults are either overweight or obese (as defined by a standard height-weight calculation).

Many experts now believe obesity will cause more death and illness in America than smoking. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the cost of obesity in the U.S. is more than \$100 billion per year.

VA is launching a major new initiative to address this issue. The Managing Overweight and/or

Obese Veterans Everywhere (MOVE!) program is a proactive approach to reducing cardiac disease and other illnesses in veterans by lowering risk factors of excess weight and sedentary lifestyle.

Under the MOVE! Initiative, we will periodically screen every patient for overweight and inactivity and provide education about healthy eating and physical activity.

MOVE! will be an important addition to our other treatments for patients who wish to lose weight. Patients will continue to be referred to dietitians and other specialists, as clinically appropriate.

If you or one of your fellow veterans would benefit from MOVE!, please take advantage of this opportunity. As always, please don't hesitate to discuss any questions or concerns you have with your primary care provider. Don't wait until New Year's Day. Make your resolution to lose weight and get into better shape today!

In closing, I'd also like to share with you some changes we've planned for our VA Canteens. We'll be updating the cafes and menus at many of our Canteens to offer you and our employees healthier (and more flavorful) choices. We hope you'll like these changes. ■

A Matter of Fat

Waist Weight Warning

Recent studies indicate that living under chronic stress conditions may increase the likelihood of especially harmful weight gain around the midsection. However, federal regulators have warned that no evidence exists in support of claims by some firms that their pills will reduce stress hormones and contribute to weight loss.

A Spoonful (or two) of Sugar

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) wants the FDA to put health-warning labels on non-diet soft drink containers with more than 13 grams of refined sugar per 12 ounces. (A

typical 12-ounce can contains up to 40 grams, or about two teaspoons of sugar.) In a report titled "Liquid Candy," CSPI states that, despite growing concerns about obesity, soda companies annually produce 37 gallons – 60,000 calories – of these sugar-laden beverages for every man, woman and child in America.

Midnight Snack Attacks

If raiding the refrigerator for a nighttime snack is one of your favorite exercises, try cereal instead. A recent study revealed that overweight folks who eat a 150-calorie bowl of cereal 90 minutes after dinner instead of their usual midnight snack will tend to eat less and lose weight.

Counting Calories

After losing 50 pounds, Dr. Lulu Hunt Peters wrote a diet book that introduced the concept of counting calories. Published in 1918, *Diet and Health: With Key to the Calories* sold two million copies and remained at or near the top of the non-fiction bestseller list through much of the early 1920s.

Knee Knowledge

Obese individuals are 15 to 25 times more likely to suffer from knee problems, including torn cartilages, than people of normal weight. ■



Veterans Outweigh

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Among those rated as morbidly obese, many have opted for, or are considering, weight loss surgery. Nationally, there are 14 VA hospitals which specialize in bariatrics, defined as relating to or specializing in the treatment of obesity. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System is among those offering this type of surgery, although its surgical team cautions that it is not an appropriate procedure for every obese patient.

There are several kinds of weight loss surgery, the least invasive of which is called Adjustable Gastric Banding (AGB). According to surgeon Bassem Safadi, who leads the bariatric team at the Palo Alto hospital, his is one of very few VA facilities which perform this surgery. "The AGB procedure," says Dr. Safadi, "is not only the least invasive, but it has the advantage of adjustability and reversibility. At the same time," he cautions, "it's a relatively new procedure, so we don't know what the long-term results might be."

In the AGB procedure, which is generally done laparoscopically, a silicone band is placed around the upper part of the stomach, creating a small pouch capable of handling only a small amount of food. As the patient loses weight, adjustments to the band involve a simple procedure conducted in the doctor's office.

Weight loss surgery, regardless of type, is not appropriate for every morbidly obese person. At Palo Alto, the Morbidly Obese Surgery Team (MOST) assesses each

patient to make sure weight loss surgery is appropriate.

"Candidates for this type of surgery are very carefully screened," notes Dr. Safadi, "and must meet certain guidelines. For example, they must be age 65 or below, and have a BMI of 40 or higher, although we also consider those with a BMI of 35 or more if they've had severe health problems, including sleep apnea, diabetes, or other conditions that interfere with their ability to perform normal family or job functions."

Other conditions patients must meet include:

- No untreated psychiatric or substance abuse problems, including smoking;
- Inability to sustain physician supervised diet and exercise programs;
- Sufficient health to undergo surgery and anesthesia;
- A stable living situation and support system.

"We also strongly encourage surgical candidates to attend the informational seminars we host," says Dr. Safadi, "and to lose at least some weight prior to surgery, not only to improve their condition, but to demonstrate that they are truly motivated to improve their health and lifestyle."

"Surgery is not a 'quick fix' of obesity," cautions Nina Bellatorre, RN, MS, a member of the Palo Alto MOST team. "For some patients, whose quality of life is greatly affected by obesity, it does offer a chance to regain control and improve their lives." ■

Proper diet and regular exercise have long been recognized as the ideal means of weight loss. To help veterans better manage their weight, the VA is developing a comprehensive weight management program.

VA National News

Electronic Health Records

A new program, called the My HealtheVet Pilot, is currently being tested at various VA Medical Centers across the country. While not yet available in any of the VA Sierra Pacific Network facilities, a national release is underway.

The My HealtheVet Pilot is a prototype developed to demonstrate that the VA can provide veterans with a safe, secure and private electronic copy of their own VA health information through an Internet web environment. This information is stored in a secure and private environment called an eVault.

Among other features, My HealtheVet Pilot participants can:

- obtain electronic copies of key portions of their health records;
- track personal health measurements, such as blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, heart rate and cholesterol;
- access a Health Education Library and health assessment tools;
- grant access to all or some of their health information to others, including family members, veteran advocates, and both VA and non-VA healthcare providers.

The success of the pilot program fulfills the vision of the My HealtheVet Steering Committee for a VA service that will empower veterans with information and tools to help them improve their health to the maximum extent possible. An additional goal is to include such electronic features as refilling prescriptions and viewing appointments. ■

palo alto

Surgeon Performs Rare Surgery

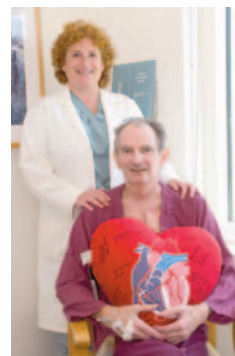
The risk of failure was high. This type of surgery had only been done once before in the world. But for former Army tank mechanic John F. Frick, whose liver had a 25-pound, malignant tumor embedded in it, there were no options.

"I'm a mechanic. I was used to fixing broken things," said Frick. "Now I was broken and needed help."

Frick, 61, got exactly what he needed, and his doctor and surgical team were overjoyed

with their success. Leading Frick's nine-hour surgery was Dr. Sherry Wren, Chief, General Surgery, at the Palo Alto hospital. "This was the toughest surgery I've ever done," said Dr. Wren. "I knew his odds weren't good. However, the option of not having surgery was even worse."

To try and save this veteran's life, she contacted the local blood bank to reserve a large backup supply of blood. She ran tests and



studied the results with other doctors. She counseled and educated Frick and his family. Finally, she put together a team of medical experts rarely seen in a private operating room – four surgeons, two anesthesiologists, three OR nurses and a perfusionist.

Frick was astounded to find out so much effort had been made for him. "I have Dr. Wren on a pedestal. I know she saved my life. I simply couldn't have gotten better care anywhere." ■

northern california

VA/DoD Agreement Enhances Services for Veterans

Hemodialysis services are now available to veterans in Solano County and surrounding areas, as a result of recent enhancements to an extremely successful sharing agreement between the VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS) and the Department of Defense (DoD).

The 10-chair jointly operated hemodialysis unit, which opened in early May, is located at David Grant Medical Center (DGMC) on

Travis Air Force Base, and offers veterans convenient access to hemodialysis services in their local community. Services under this highly specialized program are coordinated by a multidisciplinary team of caring and compassionate medical providers, including physicians, social workers, dietitians, and nursing staff.

Other recent service improvements under this partnership include the addition of a neurosurgery clinic at the Fairfield VA Outpatient Clinic, located adjacent to DGMC. The

neurosurgery clinic will provide veterans local access for most pre- and post-operative neurosurgical care services.

Since forming the VA/DoD partnership with DoD in 1994, the sharing agreement has been expanded to include inpatient, emergency room and some specialty services. This VA/DoD Sharing program provides veterans convenient access to a wide range of services and is considered one of the benchmark programs within the VA system. ■

through early detection of potential problems. Patients also report increased satisfaction with their health and their healthcare team, as well as an increase in their knowledge of their health.

Veterans with CHF, COPD, diabetes or hypertension who are interested in information on this new and easy-to-use technology may contact Anne Wallace, R.N., at (775) 786-7200, extension 2424. ■

sierra nevada

The Benefits of a Health Buddy®

The Health Buddy® is an electronic device that keeps you connected to your VA healthcare team. Veterans with congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes or hypertension are excellent candidates to receive the benefits of a Health Buddy®.

The appliance plugs into the telephone line and asks a few simple questions designed specifically for the patient and his or her particular health condition. Responses are sent daily to a case manager at VASNHCS who reviews the information to provide appropriate monitoring and interventions.

Studies have shown that having a Health Buddy® results in a reduction in emergency room visits and hospital admissions

san francisco

Upgrade Scheduled for Inpatient Facility

The San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) has been planning the seismic upgrade of



our four-story inpatient facility and will award a construction contract in September 2005. The building was erected in the 1970s and must now meet VA's more stringent seismic standards. The

upgrade is especially important as the existing building is located in San Francisco—a region known for its seismic activity.

The inpatient facility is now more than thirty years old and the seismic upgrade will provide us the excellent opportunity to meet a higher standard of patient privacy. We will convert the four-patient bedrooms to two-patient bedrooms and increase the

number of private rooms. The upgrade also allows us to redesign and reconfigure the interior spaces of the building for more efficiency and to accommodate new programs and health care advances.

The construction phase will begin in October 2005 and conclude in 2009. We will make every effort to keep disruptions to a minimum. SFVAMC is excited to update our inpatient facility and will continue to provide high quality health care during this major construction. ■

central california

Weight Management Programs Available at Nutrition Clinic

The VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS) is concerned about weight control management and offers veterans the opportunity to lose unwanted pounds. VACCHCS has five registered dietitians who collectively possess many significant certifications. Two hold Master's Degrees in Foods and Nutrition,

two are Certified Diabetes Educators, two are Certified Nutrition Support Dietitians, one is a Certified Nutrition Injury

Specialist, and one is a Certified Healthcare Executive.

These highly trained professionals assist approximately 100 patients a month in the Nutrition Clinic. Veterans with a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 25 can be scheduled for group or individual weight management classes through physician or nurse practitioner consultation, registered dietitian assessment or through self-referral. BMI values correlate significantly with body fatness and are useful for evaluating the health risks of obesity.

Individuals with a BMI of 25 through 29.9 are considered overweight, and those with a BMI 30 or more are considered obese. Weight management classes stress the importance of healthy eating/healthy lifestyles, incorporating a wide variety of nutritious foods, reducing calorie intake, decreasing portion sizes and increasing physical activity. Veterans interested in attending weight management classes can call the VACCHCS Nutrition Clinic 559-228-5361 to schedule an appointment. ■

pacific islands

Ultrasound Clinic Opens

Ultrasound is an imaging technique which uses sound waves to produce images. Used extensively to image the abdomen and pelvic organs, the heart, neck, thyroid gland and blood vessels, it has lately been gaining prominence in evaluating joints for tendon/ligament integrity. The technique is similar to the echolocation used by bats, whales and dolphins, as well as SONAR used by submarines.

The sonographer takes images of the patient, which are then printed on paper or transferred to a computer for a radiologist to review and render a diagnosis. The sonographer has to be extensively trained and very familiar with this process.

Until recently, the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VA PIHCS) sent patients for ultrasounds to Tripler Army Medical Center and other facilities. But with the addition of



ultrasound equipment, this service is now available at the Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Center. The sonographer, Robyn Wong, comes with impeccable credentials and we've started making this service available.

The ultrasound clinic is open two days a week, which may be increased as the need arises. This is another way for VA PIHCS to provide the best possible health care for our Pacific Island veterans. ■

A Bit of Jam on the Toast

Laughter has been described in various ways: as the jam on the toast of life; as a tranquilizer with no side effects; and as an instant vacation. The late Max Beerbohm, British writer and drama critic, once commented that “of all the countless folk who have lived ... on this planet, no one is known in history or in legend as having died of laughter.”

While the theme of this issue is no laughing matter, and certainly not something to be taken lightly (pun intended), we hope the following comments and advice about diet and exercise will help spread a bit of jam on the toast of your life.

What you eat standing up doesn't count. ~Beth Barnes

A diet is what helps a person gain weight more slowly. ~Bill Copeland

The trouble with jogging is that, by the time you realize you're not in shape for it, it's too far to walk back. ~Franklin P. Jones

So far on my 30-day diet, I lost 18 days. ~Terry McEntire

Never eat more than you can lift. ~Miss Piggy

I just went on the Cleveland diet. You can eat only what can live in Lake Erie. ~Pat Williams

The Vanna White Diet: You only eat what you can spell. ~Anonymous

Snacks consumed at a movie don't count; they're part of the entertainment. ~Anonymous

If no one sees you eat it, it has no calories. ~Anonymous

I don't jog. It makes the ice jump right out of my glass. ~Anonymous

I have to exercise in the morning – before my brain figures out what I'm doing. ~Anonymous

If you're going to try cross-country skiing, start with a small country. ~Anonymous ■

WORD SEARCH

A	Y	D	I	E	T	I	T	I	A	N	E	R	E	A	M	E	E	E	A	N	S	S
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- AGB

MANAGEMENT

STROKE

DIABETES

OBESITY
- EXERCISE

RISK

PROGRAM

HEALTHY

DIETITIAN
- MOTIVATION

LOSS

HEART

DISEASE

SURGERY
- STOMACH

WELLNESS

STRATEGY

FAT

OVERWEIGHT



Be the Best You Can Be – Aim for a Healthy Weight

By Carol Ceresa, MHS, RD
Clinical Nutrition Section Chief, SFVAMC

Nearly two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, and more than 365,000 die of obesity related diseases each year. An even larger percentage of the veteran population, 74 percent, is at risk for significant health problems related to overweight or obesity.

Obesity contributes to four of the leading causes of death in the United States, including our nation's biggest killer: heart disease. Overweight and obese individuals are at an increased risk of developing stroke, some types of cancers and type 2 diabetes.

How do you know if you're overweight and at health risk? Healthcare providers look at the body mass index (BMI), which considers weight in relation to height, and is closely associated with measures of body fat. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.0 is considered healthy. A person with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight and, at 30 or more, obese. BMI is automatically calculated and listed in your electronic medical record. You can ask your healthcare provider for that information.

Another measure of health risk is your waist circumference. If you carry fat mainly around your waist, you're more likely to develop health problems than if you carry it mainly in your hips and thighs.

There are many reasons and complex strategies for how to cope with an increasingly overweight population. VA is participating in a national program called MOVE (Managing Overweight Veterans Everywhere). The MOVE program may vary from VA facility to VA facility.

For instance, at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, there are three options for weight loss programs: a one-time session called "Introduction to a Healthy Weight," with follow-up groups; a dietitian and psychologist co-lead an eight week group; and a new weight management "Boot Camp," a more structured approach with an emphasis on getting and staying motivated.

VA healthcare providers will work with you to better choose and take the actions needed for weight loss and good health. Ask your local VA facility what weight management programs are available. Working together, we can help you be your best!

Carol Ceresa is the Group Leader for the Health Promotion/Prevention and Disease Management component of VA's Clinical Nutrition Advisory Board. She is author of the *Bad Back Diet* and nutrition consultant to Jacques Pépin's *Table* cookbook. ■

Climbing for Fitness



Enthusiasm for a healthier life abounds with employees of the VA Central California Healthcare System in Fresno. With the new "Stairwell to Better Health and Care," they've explored new reasons for using the main stairwell within the facility. The stairwell project was implemented to encourage and promote physical well-being and individual wellness, not only among VA employees, but for volunteers, patients and visitors as well.

The Stairwell officially opened in March with an inspirational 'climb to the sky,' and features new vibrantly colored walls, health related wall art, and inspirational quotes to keep you moving. Employees and their families have added personal photos on wall-mounted displays at every floor, reflecting their commitment to a healthier lifestyle, from rock climbing in Yosemite National Park to river rafting to softball and soccer.

All these improvements have helped create interest for everyone, as they climb all or portions of the 180 steps covering eight floors. Employees and volunteers have always been encouraged to walk up one flight of stairs and down two, freeing up elevator availability for patients and their families. Now they routinely enjoy the stairs and often use the stairwell as a group, knowing they're doing it for better health and enjoying the effort as well. ■